

To the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors:

April 7, 2015

We call on you to take action to address racism in Contra Costa County's law enforcement. We are a coalition of organizations and individuals committed to eliminating racial inequalities in Contra Costa. We are people who live and work here. Despite District Attorney Mark Peterson's claim that "racism is not the reason for disparity in [the] criminal justice system," we know from current research and our own experience that racism is very much a part of the problem. Systemic bias against people of color is a reality we see every day, and we will not stand for more of the same.

Leading law enforcement officials agree that racial bias in the criminal justice system is a problem across the country. Attorney General Eric Holder has acknowledged that "systemic and unwarranted racial disparities remain disturbingly common," and "African-American men have received sentences that are nearly 20 percent longer than those imposed on white males convicted of similar crimes." Consistent with this, the Department of Justice has found that "African Americans experience disparate impact in nearly every aspect of Ferguson's law enforcement system." The same inequalities fester in cities throughout the U.S.

Contra Costa is not immune from the nationwide epidemic. Black men and women are six times more likely than their white counterparts to be in jail in Contra Costa. Despite this, Mr. Peterson claims law enforcement is "colorblind" in our county and claims that the disparity is because "crimes are perpetrated disproportionately by poor people of color." We reject these assertions, and we call for action to ameliorate the inequalities of our system.

To that end, we recommend the following:

1. That all Contra Costa County employees participate in mandatory annual implicit bias training;
2. That this Board perform an audit of arrests and prosecutions in the county and generate a public report with findings on racial disparities;
3. That the Board implement a civilian police review board and civilianization of police complaint intake;
4. That this Board restore parity in compensation between the District Attorney and Public Defender;
5. That this Board implement policies and fund programming to increase proportional representation of people of color in county juries;
6. That this Board adopt a resolution to take all necessary measures to reduce systemic and unwarranted racial disparities in our criminal justice system.

We ask you to hear our voices and to be moved to change the status quo. If Contra Costa is to move closer to justice for people of all colors, we will need to take concrete steps in the right direction. If you are on the side of addressing racism in Contra Costa rather than denying it, then you can only demonstrate this through your actions.

Respectfully,  
The Contra Costa County Racial Justice Coalition

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1. Racism is not the reason for disparity in criminal justice system by *Mark Peterson, 2015 Bay Area News Group*
  2. "ALL LIVES MATTER" by *District Attorney Mark Peterson, press release, December 23, 2014*
  3. *General Eric Holder at the Morgan State University commencement ceremony in Baltimore, May 17, 2014.*
  4. Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department, by *The Department of Justice, March 4, 2015*
  5. Bureau of Justice Statistics Annual Survey of Jails, 2013
  6. U.S. Census Bureau, 2013